

Save all Life in the World

- of man and bird and beast

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All beings dread death. It is also true that all dread being battered and beaten. This, we must remember about ourselves as well. Therefore we shall neither kill nor bring about the death of others. This idea is beautifully expressed in the Buddhist Manual of Good Living called the Dhammapada as follows.

*Sabbe tasanti daṇḍassa sabbe bhāyanti maccuno
attānam upamaṃ katvā na haneyya na ghātaye.*

Dhp. v.129

This Buddhist attitude of living in friendship with all else that lives everywhere, i.e. both on this earth and in the universe as a whole, is comprehensively covered under the terms *mettā* in Pali and *maitrī* in Sanskrit. It is often referred to as 'universal loving kindness'. It is, in other words, 'the spirit of friendliness expressed without any reservations towards all living things'.

This magnanimous philosophy of amity or friendship in Buddhism is fully enunciated in the Metta Sutta of the Buddhists [Sn. vv. 143-152 and Khp. p.8f.], and brings within its fold all grades of life, of man and bird and beast, no matter how large or small they are. Seen or unseen, near or far, all life is encompassed within thoughts of loving kindness. In displeasure or in ill-will, one shall not long for or plan for the destruction of another. With more or less maternal affection, one is called upon to look at all life in the universe [= *Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttam āyusā ekaputtam anurakkahe / Evam'pi sabba-bhūtesu mānaṃ bhāvaye aparimānam.* op.cit.]. This attitude to the vast world we live in is expected to pervade all areas of Buddhist life, both religious and secular.

World Trends Today

As we take into consideration this wide concept of the universe, we discover that life on earth, has to be a co-operative process, based on the principle of inter-relatedness, not only of mutual assistance but also of mutual non-interruption and non-interference, in order that serious imbalances and consequent destruction of parts or the whole might not be brought about. The scientists of the world today emphatically announce the disastrous movement of man, unwittingly though, in the direction of destroying the *biota* of the world we live in. Note what the men, whose thinking in the world matters, say on this subject.

"The one process now going on that will take millions of years to correct is the loss of genetic and species diversity by the destruction of natural habitats. This is the folly our descendants are least likely to forgive us.

Although oft-cited and reported, the scale of the unfolding catastrophic loss of many and varied ecosystems through human activity is still only dimly perceived, for the link between the degradation of the *biota* and the diminishment of the human prospect is poorly understood."

[The Biophilia Hypothesis. Edited by Stephen R. Kellart and Edward O. Wilson, Island Press, 1993, p.4].

The protagonists of the idea of *biophilia hypothesis* whom we have quoted above are laudably moving today in the same direction as espoused in Buddhism. This is already in the spirit of the teachings of Śākya Muni Buddha who expressed them more than two and a half millennia ago. These thinkers of today whom we would unhesitatingly call philosopher scientists, reiterate the utterances of this ancient wisdom. But they cannot emphasize it any more than what their Sri Lankan predecessors have implicitly done more than a thousand years earlier. The contemporary stress on this kind of thinking, namely that the desire for the survival of man must go closely hand in hand with an equal degree

of respect for the survival and well-being of the animal world around us is boldly reflected in the writings of today's philosopher-thinkers like Peter Singer [Professor of Philosophy at Monash University, Australia.]. One must cooperatively read his **Animal Liberation** [1975, 1990] and his **Save the Animals** [co-authored with Barbara Dover and Ingrid Newkirk, 1990,1991], with an appreciable measure of sympathy, to comprehend the total dimension of this line of thinking and to meaningfully relate it to the Buddhist concept of love or universal loving kindness [*mettā*].

In a beautifully written brief FOREWORD to the small book **Save the Animals** referred to above, Linda Mc Cartney writes the following with a remarkably disarming candour.

'A long time ago we realized that anyone who cares about the Earth -- really cares -- must stop eating animals. The more we read about deforestation, water pollution, and topsoil erosion, the stronger that realization becomes. Of course, anyone who cares about *animals* must stop eating animals. Just the thought of what happens in a slaughter house is enough. We stopped eating meat the day we happened to look out of our window during Sunday lunch and saw our young lambs playing happily, as kittens do, in the fields. Eating bits of them suddenly made no sense. In fact, it was revolting. If you want to live a longer and healthier life, the conclusion is exactly the same, *naturally*.'

This spirit of concern for the world we live in and the total content thereof, both animate and inanimate, is reflected today in many other parts of the thinking world. Here is Frances Moore Lappe expressing a very candid opinion on this subject in her **Diet for a Small Planet** [Twentieth Anniversary Edition: November 1991 / Ballantine Books, New York].

'The change you and I witness in a lifetime now exceeds what in previous centuries transpired over many generations. And we who were born after

World War II are the first to know that our choices count: They count on a global scale. They matter in evolutionary time. In our species' fantastic rush toward "modernization" we obliterate millions of other species, transfigure the earth's surface, and create climate-changing disruption of the upper atmosphere, all powerfully altering the path of evolution.

More personally, I feel the quickening of time in realizing that what was hearsay, what was "fringe," when I wrote **Diet for a Small Planet** just twenty years ago is now common knowledge.

Then, the notion that human beings could do well without meat was heretical. Today, the medical establishment acknowledges the numerous benefits of eating low on the food chain.

Then, anyone who questioned the American diet's reliance on beef -- since cattle are the most wasteful converters of grain to meat -- was perceived as challenging the American way of life (especially, when that someone came from Fort Worth, Texas -- "Cowtown, USA"). Today, the expanding herds of cattle world-wide are not only recognized as poor plant-to-meat converters but are documented contributors to global climate change. They're responsible for releasing enormous quantities of methane into the atmosphere, contributing to global warming.

Then, anyone who questioned industrial agriculture - fossil fuel and chemically dependent -- was seen as naive "back to the lander." To challenge industrial agriculture was to question efficiency itself and to wish us all back into the fields at hard labor. Today, the National Academy of Sciences acknowledges the threat of agricultural chemicals and even the U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that the small family farm is at least as efficient as the super-farms undermining America's rural communities. ' [Ibid. p. xv f.]

More recently we discovered Jeremy Riffkin writing on this same theme in his book which is amazingly titled **BEYOND BEEF**, and even more meaningfully subtitled **Breakdown of the Cattle Culture**.

A New Awareness Around Us

Buddhism's basic policy, via its religious direction, is first to maximize the healthy and harmonious acquisition of all that is needed to make human life at its very down to earth level, both physically and mentally, comfortable and pleasant. This policy, in fact, does cover all beings, both human and non-human. Hence the recurrent Buddhist theme 'May all beings be well and happy' [= *Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā*]. This we would unhesitatingly declare as the 'living ethic' of Buddhism. This would constitute the basic ethics of living needed for the survival of humans in the world. To us, this is vitally the heritage of Buddhism which has been delivered to the world with such sensitivity and awareness. Out of this spirit also grow the cultural and religious institutions which become natural derivatives of the religion. It shall be our concern to talk about their preservation and fostering as well.

Within this magnanimous gesture of wishing well to the other are contained two concepts which are elegantly encompassed within the words *sukha* [= physical comfort] and *somanassa* [= mental satisfaction] as relevant factors relating to the process we call life or living. Humans are declared to be characteristically pleasure seekers or *sukha-kāmā*. They are said to be equally averse, by their very nature, to displeasure and discomfort [= *dukkha-paṭikkūlā*]. On this principle, the world cannot, and must not turn its back. When humans act contrary to this principle, the net result thereof is misery and unhappiness in the world. And we are positively certain that it is not the outcome of any wrath from elsewhere. It is definitely an error of human judgement and consequently of human action.

While death is declared in Buddhism to be more real than life, it is true that

people still recoil from death and from being put to death [= *sabbe bhāyanti maccuno*]. It is well and truly nature's way that things [including the inanimate] which have come into existence, also cease to be in the same way [*vayadhammā saṅkhārā*]. Therefore it is assumed that it is incumbent on humans to keep death and destruction of life, even in the animal world, at its farthest [*Na haneyya na ghātaye* = One shall not destroy life nor get others to do so].

This respect for life is undoubtedly the most fundamental feature of the Buddhist heritage which the Buddhists, who are truly committed to the teachings of their Master, must stand up to promote and uphold. As the impact of Buddhism came to be felt more and more on the life of Emperor Asoka of India, we see him increasingly practice this love towards animals. Not only the provision of sanctuaries for animals but even a reduction in the slaughter of animals for the royal kitchen is witnessed.

At the time Asoka sent his son Thera Mahinda to Sri Lanka with the message of Buddhism, Tissa who was the ruler of this land, was unfortunately caught on the wrong foot, going out on his royal hunt to bag a deer [= *migavaṃ gato*]. Understandably, and us giving Tissa the benefit of the doubt, he was at the time the ruler of a non-Buddhist Sri Lanka. It must have caused him no small amount of embarrassment to be caught red-handed in this act by the Thera Mahinda, the emissary sent by his unseen friend Emperor Asoka, who arrived here with the Buddhism's message of love to all things both great and small.

It did not take long in Sri Lanka for the turn of this tide. Kings began to show consideration for the life of animals. Ban on the slaughter of animals came to be imposed from time to time. Kings of Sri Lanka like Amaṇḍagāminī, Silākāla, Aggabodhi IV and Mahinda III, following this tradition of just kingship, ordered from time to time that no animals should be slaughtered [*Māghātaṃ kārayi dīpe sabbesaṃ yeva pāṇinam*. Mhv. Ch. 41. v.30], and set up veterinary hospitals for the treatment of sick animals. That even fishes, birds and beasts [*macchānaṃ*

migapakkhīnaṃ Ibid. 48. v. 97] came under the loving care [*kattabbaṃ sabbāṃ ācari*. Ibid] of a king like Sena I is undoubtedly owing to the benevolent influence of Buddhism.

Sanctuaries for animals, including 'safe pools' for fish in rivers and lakes became a common sight in the land. This is more to be viewed as a magnanimous change of heart and a desirable change in the value systems of the land. It seems to make much less sense to view this [as some of our own Sri Lankan researchers at times have done] as a total imposition of vegetarianism or as leading, on the other hand, to malnutrition or economic disaster.

In fact, one of the kings is supposed to have popularized the eating of fruits as against the 'easy way ' of meat eating and himself undertaken the growing of various types of fruit like the red melon in the land. Obviously they knew what they were doing and had commendable long-range vision. They also seem to have held the view that it was too presumptuous to believe that man had exclusive rights over the land in which he lived to the exclusion of fauna and flora. On the other hand, they believed that the fauna and flora not only had a right of their own but also contributed in no small measure to the total harmonious growth of the land. This ecological sensitivity and the respect man has for it, is the main stay which in the long run saves him from extinction.

To be in harmony with the world around us, both with the animate and the inanimate, is one of the principles advocated in Buddhism, in order that man may attain his fullest development within himself and also secure for himself the maximum degree of success and happiness in life in the world outside. And this latter, Buddhism insists, must be achieved without violence to anyone or anything, and at the same time fostering peace on earth and goodwill among men. It must be remembered by all, the rulers and the ruled, that within the framework of Buddhist thinking, no heavenly injunction, no matter delivered from where, shall do violence to this.

We have adequately pointed out above that the world at large has now reached this awareness that man on this planet must forthwith stop his destruction of life around him. Man seems to destroy life through his greed for what he believes to be his personal survival. This is the calculated process of destruction through large scale rearing of cattle for meat, hide and other needs. In this process, he little realizes that he is destroying the chances of survival on this planet of everybody including himself. This greed for personal need, and this we say emphatically together with the social philosophers of the day, is a totally misdirected and self-assumed need which blinds him to the worldwide destruction he brings upon mankind.

The sources we have already quoted above like Frances Moore Lappe, Peter Singer and Jeremy Riffkin, from different periods of time and from many different parts of the world, have established with more than adequate statistical evidence the folly of these endeavours of misguided economists and planners in the world. Those who plan on paper, sitting at their desks, unmindful of the consequences of their paper work, have to be put today into the same category as the men who planned the splitting up of the atom, unmindful of what could happen in Hiroshima.

Besides this massive global destruction of life to feed humans which has been successfully pointed out by saner men and women of greater sensibility to be a misguided foolish venture, there is also the largely organized killing of animals for industrial purposes. These include hunting of whales for oil, trapping of bears, foxes and others for furs and hunting down of elephants for ivory. These are far too numerous to mention here.

A Heritage to Preserve and Foster: Love and Respect for Life

In the name of Buddhism what do we wish to show as our Buddhistness and offer to the world. It is the message of love which our great Master Buddha Gotama announced to the world. He is the one whom the whole Buddhist world

including the Mahayanists and the Vajrayanists now recognize as the historical Buddha and refer to by the name Shakya Muni. This was his unmistakable message.

Love the world with the same degree of love you show yourself: *Attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā*. Therefore kill not nor bring about any killing:
Na haneyya na ghātaye. Dhp. v.129

This is where the religiousness of every Buddhist begins and should necessarily begin. Out of the five basic precepts of the Buddhist *pañca-sīla*, the very first one begins with the restraint relating to destruction of life: *pāṇātipātā veramaṇī*. This, we maintain, is the heritage worth preserving, worth fostering. Let us begin by reducing killing to a minimum. The world as a whole is now convincingly pointing out that neither for the sake of more food for human consumption nor for the sake of more money for the state coffers, do humans need to go menacingly at the animal world. It seems more a bestial policy befitting life in the jungle than a civilized society of so-called humans marching in the direction of the twenty-first century.

We have already indicated the diverse areas in human society where love and respect for life can and must essentially come in, both out of humane considerations and out of a need for our own survival on this planet, as envisioned in modern scientific and philosophical writings like **Biophilia Hypothesis**. It is now being daily argued and proved more and more that no power besides man is holding the security of the world in hand. And that more and more destruction of the world, no matter who created it, is also being worked out by man with his own hands, whether they be the atomic explosions over Hiroshima or the destruction of the protective ozone layer above the earth through man's destructive use of chemicals down below. No body besides man, evidently, seems to step in to intervene and correct these misdeeds.

It is here that all religions and all philisophies must come forward to emphasize the role of human endeavour to correct human behaviour in thought, word and deed in the interest of human well-being.

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